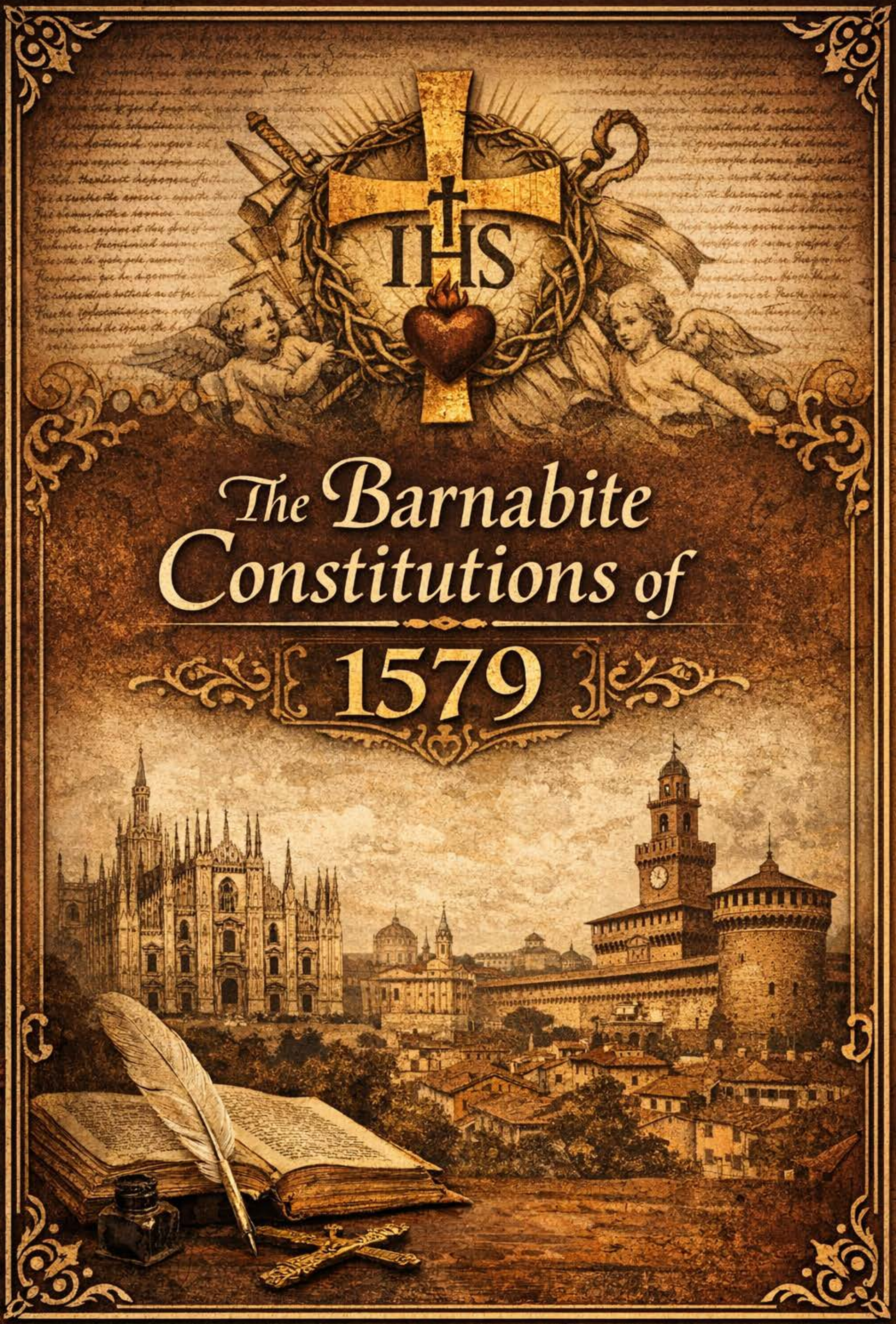
The Barnabite Constitutions of 1579



In the name of God we begin the Constitutions of the Sons of St. Paul the Apostle, along with additions corresponding to their Rules.

CONSTITUTIONS (1579)

Foreword

We do not want any of our brothers, except those who do not keep the three vows or the commandments of God, to be bound under penalty of either mortal or venial sin for transgressing anything contained in the following statements with reference to natural or canon law. Likewise, let no penalty be imposed on anyone except those for whom a penalty is prescribed.

CHAPTER I: ON CHURCH FUNCTIONS

All year round, Matins is to be recited at daybreak, followed by Prime. After Terce, Mass is to be celebrated. When Mass is over, Sext is to be said along with None in winter, but in summer None is to be postponed until after lunch. Vespers and Compline are to be said in the evening. All the Hours are to be recited slowly and accurately, without chanting and without organ, but (as far as possible) with total devotion.

No more than two or three Masses are to be celebrated besides the community Mass. At the community Mass, those who were given permission may receive Communion, though sometimes in cases of necessity they may also be allowed to receive at one of the other Masses. Let anyone according to his disposition go to Communion at least every Sunday[1] and on holy days of obligation. Likewise, confession is not to be put off for more than a week; however, it may be made more often.

There should be only one bell, a small one, but such that it may be heard all over the house. It should be rung at every Hour in the morning as well as at Vespers, two strokes each time, with the second one lasting only as long as is necessary for one to arrive on time from the most distant part of the house.

Our chapels are to be humble and poor: no sculptures, no carpets, and no silken drapes. There may be paintings, but not sophisticated ones, and indeed, only those that truly inspire devotion. Our chapels may have a bell tower, but it should be simple, and should not be higher than six feet above the roof.

No brother should accept a stipend from anyone for offering Mass or for any other religious service. Even without payment, but solely for the love of God, the brothers ought to pray for the dead or for anyone who may be in material or spiritual need. For no reason should they accept alms in return for a commitment to the aforesaid services, lest by chance they should begin illicit bargaining, and this with the blood of Christ. Furthermore, if miracles should happen in our houses and because of these miracles alms are offered, we desire that these alms be fully controlled by laypeople charged with the task. They should not use them for sculptures, paintings, vestments, or any other unusual embellishment; rather, they should distribute them to Christ's poor.

All the Hours and the Mass should be celebrated according to the Roman Rite, in such a way as to accommodate our brothers rather than favor the laziness of laypeople.

No one should attend the celebration of the Office in other communities or participate in their processions unless he is obliged by his spiritual and temporal superiors. In such cases, he should attend without vestments and follow under their cross and banner.

CHAPTER II: ON THE THREE VOWS: OBEDIENCE

For no reason whatsoever does the Superior have the right to bind anyone under penalty of grave sin without his Discreet's consent, and even in this case it should be done most rarely. It is a very bad sign if a Superior is obliged to apply such a measure. It would perhaps be a lesser evil to expel disobedient religious from the Congregation than to bind them with the precept of obedience.

Obedience must be voluntary, not forced. Indeed, religious should always be ready and well-disposed in obeying the desires of the Superior (even though they fear he might impose on them some kind of burden); they should not wait for a formal order.

CHAPTER III: ON THE THREE VOWS: CHASTITY

Let anyone be instantly expelled from the Congregation if he is caught even one time—and I do not mean only if he is actually doing something indecent with words or writings or gestures or actions, but even if he simply suggests that he intentionally considered any such matters.

Furthermore, if anyone is found to be reluctant to progress in the virtue of chastity (by avoiding anything contrary to it) so that his body and mind, as far as possible, may not be stained by such things, he is to be sent away without hesitation.

Take care, though, to use prudence in this matter, lest you should expel someone whose soul is simply put to the test by the devil or by divine permission. You can be sure that such is the case when you see that he willingly restrains his tongue, shuns levity and idleness, practices profound humility, and—as far as possible—joyfully desires true integrity of body and soul. When, on the contrary, such signs are not present, there will be much to fear in regards to his willful negligence.

CHAPTER IV: ON THE THREE VOWS: POVERTY

Neither possessions nor annual revenues from money, clothes, provisions, or any such things may be accepted for any reason whatsoever. Furthermore, were such things left to us, directly or indirectly, in a will, they should not be sold and not even the least profit accepted from either the property or its interest, even if they were given freely and voluntarily; rather, everything should be left to the heirs or to whomever the owners choose.

Our houses must be so poor as to be truly called huts rather than houses. They should not have any sculptures or colors except white. To defend ourselves from cold weather or humidity we may use mats and planks, but coarse ones, and not refined or adorned in any way. We may possess a vegetable garden, but not lands or fields or woods. Thus, if any wealthy or noble persons desire to build splendid houses and chapels for our brothers, we must never allow them nor accept their offer. Let them live in their sumptuous mansions and give those things to

whomever they please. It is already a shame for us to have houses, and how much worse to have mansions!

Only one person should be in charge of the money. He must see to it that all the money is used within a month for the needs of the community or for almsgiving. If he fails to do so, the first time, he should fast on bread and water for three days; the second time, he is to be deprived of Holy Communion for a whole year, except on Easter, and he should be separated from the rest of the brothers not only in all community undertakings but also during community prayer and recreation. And for the entire year, once a week, he should fast on bread and water. Finally, if he commits the same fault a third time, consider him as a proprietor and cast him out of the Congregation.

Supplies of wine and other provisions are not to be retained for more than a month, nor are they to be renewed except two days before they are consumed. No one is permitted to borrow money or provisions or to buy anything on credit for any need whatsoever, except perhaps to supply for the needs of a sick brother.

Our brothers are allowed to go door to door to collect alms, but for no more than a day's need. Thus they may understand that such is poverty: having little and being content with simple and few things.

Our brothers must preserve and take care of the things that belong to the community—certainly not out of greed but out of reverence, for they are in a sense consecrated to the Lord—to the point that anyone who by negligence causes some of these things, even the smallest, to break or rot, to deteriorate or be lost, may be almost perceived as committing a sacrilege.

In giving or lending to others, be generous and joyful.[2] Never enter into dispute or argument with anyone on account of something that belongs to the monastery; rather, let him have it.

The furniture of the house should be so scarce and unpolished as to look inferior to that owned by peasants. Our clothes may be made of wool, but of low quality. In addition, our clothes must be tailored in such a way that any brother can wear them. It may be permitted to use animal hides, but not those of wild animals. Bed cloths must be made of wool, not linen. Likewise, no one, for any reason whatsoever, should use linen garments.

Let there be no discrimination, as far as possible, in the distribution of food and clothing, and let it be done according to circumstances of need.

Happy indeed shall we be as long as our hearts are so firmly set in the desire for poverty that we wish not to be among those poor who have superfluous things but to be among those who lack even the necessary things. And if some religious happen to complain about poverty and would like the community to possess more, you will do well to not listen to them; rather, consider them as enemies of the poverty of Christ, who willed to be deprived of nearly all the necessities of life.

CHAPTER V: ON FOOD AND FASTING

Our brothers who enjoy good health are not allowed to eat meat, except on certain feasts and solemnities: Christmas and the two following days; Easter and Pentecost and two days following each solemnity; the Assumption and the Nativity of Our Lady; the Birth of St. John the Baptist; the Conversion and Death of St. Paul; and All Saints' Day. On these days they are allowed to eat meat, mostly to avoid pride and ambition, but this meat should merely be boiled

and of quantity sufficient for only one small serving. No one in our houses is permitted to keep malmsey, vernaccia, or other sweet wines, or to accept them from other people, except perhaps for the sick when the doctor prescribes them as medicine.

Let no one accept, for whatever reason, things that we do not use. For those we use, even if they are given to particular persons, they must be distributed to all so that everyone can benefit from them. At table, let no one in any way offer some of his food to others, except maybe to those who sit beside him. Where we have our own houses, no one is allowed to eat elsewhere unless a bishop or civil leader emphatically requests that a brother dine with him.

Fasting is to be observed and continued from All Saints' Day to Easter. If anyone wishes to drink in the evening, let him have some bread also to avoid stomach weakness, but not during Lent or Advent or on appointed vigils. At such times, instead of bread he may have some fruit. During the rest of the year, we are to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, unless there are vigils during the week, in which case fasting on Wednesdays—particularly in summer—can be omitted.

Let everyone avoid, in every place, time, and age, eating anything—no matter how insignificant or small in quantity—for the simple reason that it tastes good, for this, as you know, is gluttony. And you can be sure that, if one becomes the slave of this vice, one will never make progress in the way of God; indeed, he will always be subjected to all the other passions as well. Therefore, if you have not reached this degree of detachment—namely, of not taking delight in eating—at least, by all means, stop eating only for pleasure. Be always aware, though, that sometimes under the guise of necessity is hidden the poison of sensuality. Anyone who is able to control gluttony through temperance and to overcome pride will unmistakably make progress. Because we eat and drink, we ought to consider ourselves unworthy of conversing with angels and the many saintly people who are still with us. Similarly, we should recognize that we are like animals whose only happiness is bodily pleasure.

Besides the usual daily meals in common—dinner and supper, and no more than these two meals— no one, except the sick, whose appetites may need to be whetted, is allowed to snack, either occasionally or habitually, whether with cheap or exquisite foods. This we do in order to combat gluttony and to allow ourselves only what is necessary. The brothers should take care so as to not prepare food on a specific day more exquisitely or in greater quantity than on another day. According to the liturgical season, our brothers may be permitted to use as condiments butter, cheese, any kind of fat or oil, eggs, and small fish.

CHAPTER VI: ON THE CARE OF THE SICK

Carefully tend to the sick and diligently look after them. Indeed, in this matter of caring for the sick, the Superior should not be found negligent. And so, when he is in the house and is not sick himself, he is bound to personally visit every day those who are in bed and are sick and, to the best of his ability, to comfort them and cheer them up with words and deeds.

Attend to them day and night, according to the gravity of their illness.

The sick may eat meat, but only when they do not have any appetite, or when other foods do not agree with their stomachs or do not give them proper nourishment. When at last they recover their normal way of eating, stop giving them meat. If someone is sick but still has a fairly good appetite and a stomach that can handle ordinary food, either by its own strength or by the help of the medicines prescribed by the doctor, he should not eat meat.

Our brothers are to sleep on straw or wool mattresses. However, the sick, when their illness requires it, may be allowed to use bedding made of wool or linen, as long as they are of simple, homespun quality. Our brothers may be permitted to go to public baths, but we should pay for it, not our relatives and friends.

Now if anyone, on account of his weak body, finds that he is unable to observe the aforesaid rules, let him at least abstain from things he can surely control: grumbling, anger, pride, contempt, and other things that do not demand bodily strength. Then, he should strive to practice spiritual works such as humbling himself, having compassion toward others, meditating, teaching, and other things that require no great physical effort.

CHAPTER VII: ON TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

The brothers who are obliged by obedience to travel are permitted to eat meals outside, but no more than two meals per day, and to eat any kind of food, but always according to the liturgical season.

Let no one deceive himself by saying that he cannot walk. But if he really cannot, he should not ride a steed or a handsome mule but rather any ordinary animal that is suitable for the purpose.

Our brothers are not to wear any gloves or boots at all; rather, in other people's houses, as in ours, they are to wear slippers. On arriving to their destination, they are to visit our church, or the parish church, to give thanks to God.

Before setting out on a journey, they must recite the *Benedictus* with the antiphon and the prayer for travelers. Brothers, during your trip and at other times, avoid all distraction and curiosity, for if there is anyone whom the devil usually overcomes, it is those who are distracted.

When traveling, you should be in groups of at least two or three, so that you may be able to help one another in either your spiritual or material needs. To this end, you must request your companions rather than choose them yourselves, so that you will not be ashamed or fearful if for any reason you should need to report faults committed by your companions.

No one should leave the house for any insignificant reason or merely to go for a walk, but only for some urgent necessity. Everyone in the house or outside should take care to be recollected in the cell of his heart and strive not to leave it.

Receive guests—be they yours or of others or of our community—and assist them lovingly and joyfully. Treat them as you would your own confreres. But when, according to our Constitutions, we fast, at suppertime you shall serve the guests what they need, but always in accordance with our poverty and our customs. If they are not satisfied with what you serve and they complain about it, and they try to bring their own food, on no account should you allow them unless they are sick. In this case, you should provide for them as you would provide for our own sick brothers. If they are not satisfied with the food we have provided, send them away kindly, for we cannot allow them to turn our houses into restaurants. After all, we have given them what is necessary.

Moreover, be firmly convinced that to be excessive in our customary hospitality in order to please our guests is to give in to gluttony—a vice that is inevitably associated with many other disorders that we abhor and condemn, both in others and in ourselves.

CHAPTER VIII: ON STUDIES

Our brothers shall not be permitted to read books written by heretics or schismatics; nor shall they be allowed to study the so-called liberal arts or any empty, useless, verbose poetry or philosophy. They shall study Sacred Scripture and relish it so intensely as to come to understand it fully, thus reaching its hidden senses, especially those that provide moral edification. Besides Sacred Scripture, they may read any Doctor approved by the Church and the books of the Church Fathers, provided that their writings do not disagree with the teachings of Sacred Scripture and the Doctors of the Church. And in a very special way let them find greater delight in reading those books and authors that deal with the formation of good habits, the perfection of Christian life, and the true imitation of Christ, such as the following (according to what St. Benedict suggests in his Rule[3]): the *Collationes* by John Cassian; the *Lives of the Church Fathers*, especially those written by St. Jerome; John Climacus; Abbot Isaac of Syria; *The Mirror of Perfection*; *The Mirror of the Cross*; *On the Cantica* of Blessed Bartholomew [of Breganze] O.P.; St. Bonaventure; *The Letters* and *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena; our Father Fra Battista da Crema; and other books of this nature, which, if they are well understood and put into practice, will surely lead us to perfection.

You should know that it is better to read a little and reflect deeply upon it than to hastily read too many subjects and authors, for this leads more to feeding our curiosity than to serious study. Therefore, we exhort everyone (insofar as one can) to delight in and dedicate himself to acquiring that which will teach him how to write his own books (even though he may know only the first elements of literature) rather than gaining superficial knowledge from other people's books. You will do this through genuine imitation of Jesus Crucified, total victory over yourselves, and complete control over your passions. Thus, you will gather such great knowledge as to be able to win over the philosophers themselves. Certainly, some have written books even with no help from other people's books, thanks to their natural intelligence and other God-given qualities.

At table, you shall read some of the aforementioned books. Then, according to time and circumstances, you can also read and explain to the brothers some books on good conduct or even on canon law.

CHAPTER IX: ON THE COMMUNITY'S SPIRITUAL MEETINGS

No one, cleric or lay brother, shall willfully be absent from the community's spiritual meetings, which are to be held every day for at least an hour. Gathered together, you shall discuss the following: how to root out vices, how to acquire true and real—not imaginary—virtues, the help and providence of God and of the angels, the snares of the devil, the perfection of [Christian and religious] life, and the height of virtue. You shall likewise discuss the causes and occasions that bring about the decline of good habits and the development of bad habits, and which signs precede these occurrences. And consider also which good effects are caused by good inclinations and which evil effects may accidentally result from them; which evil effects are caused by bad inclinations and which good effects flow from them; the causes of spiritual fervor and lukewarmness, and their respective characteristics and dominant manifestations; and the causes of compunction and of the barrenness of the mind, with its stability and instability. Thus, following this method, you will be able to, as indeed you must, deal with many things. By carefully determining and defining them, you will derive great profit.

Sometimes (whenever there arises a need for it), you can also take up as points for reflection the development of Christendom, the morals of our society, and anything directly concerned with the glory of Christ.

In these spiritual meetings, you must certainly shun all manner of subtle discussions. Do not consider morals in generalities, but in concrete details. Do not discuss your topics academically as at the University of Paris—that is, purely in the abstract—but according to the oratorical method of the Church Fathers, with exhortation and persuasion, and you must always avoid words that are excessively refined or fastidious.

Do not be argumentative in any way. And when you deem it fit, you will listen to what some of our uneducated or simple brothers have to say, being careful not to deride them if they express themselves poorly or digress from the point; rather, we must have compassion on them and see ourselves in them, since what we have is not ours.

Any conclusions arrived at by the senior brothers—senior not so much because of their age but because of their praiseworthy life—shall be recorded in a special book. If you deem it advisable, you may go over the same subject two or three times until it is well understood. After some time (if this seems useful to you), you can reread what has previously been written down, and, if circumstances allow, you may add something to it.

Let it then be known to you, brothers, that by omitting these spiritual meetings your spiritual life will suffer badly; on the contrary, if you continue to hold them with great love and eagerness—and not merely out of habit—you will make progress in everything.

CHAPTER X: ON PRAYER

For anyone seriously concerned with becoming proficient in the spiritual life, mental prayer is essential. You can, in fact, affirm without any shadow of a doubt that no one will ever make any progress if he does not dedicate himself to it and delight in it, no matter how many psalms and other prayers he may mechanically recite all day long. You must know, brothers, that mental prayer is the food and nourishment of those progressing on the way to perfection. Therefore, if you do not feed your spirit with it, you are inevitably going to fail on the way.

Vocal prayer alone, especially if it does not lead us to or partake of mental prayer, makes us feel good superficially; it is a worthless replacement for true prayer and true spiritual food. And you can understand this by observing that when you neglect mental prayer, you remain the very ones you were before—namely, shallow in your conversation, negligent in your work, and imperfect in everything.

Prayer

Therefore, let everyone endeavor, with tight lips, to pray mentally to God and to offer to Him one's thoughts as a friend to a friend. Be aware that exterior or vocal prayer has been devised so that we, inspired by its taste and meaningfulness, may eventually begin to learn interior prayer.

Petition

In your prayer, ask God for what you need and for what you would like to have more abundantly, and also for what He judges to be more useful to your dear friends and to the universal Church.

Supplication

And so that God may more easily hear your prayer, offer to Him the precious blood of Christ and the merits of all the saints, and indeed the very love He has for humankind.

Thanksgiving

By so doing, you will finally be able to reach that state of prayer which has its origin in intention, devotion, and experience. This is the state of prayer that consists in always giving thanks to God.

When you have reached this point, you will know that your petitions have been granted even before you have made them. You will know that you have received more than what you have asked for. You will know that your prayers are always heard.

Certainly, brothers, there is reason to wonder when someone among you says, "I do not know how to pray mentally." Do you want to learn how? Refrain from superfluous and even necessary conversation, and then you will begin to talk with God as you talk with a friend.

Or perhaps someone else will say, "I feel no delight at the beginning of my mental prayer." My answer is, Make sure to nourish your mind with thoughts of compunction, such as thoughts on the Passion of Christ, on the sorrows of Mary, or on other similar things. But if even in this way you do not succeed in obtaining remorseful thoughts, persist in prayer and do not turn away from it, and especially maintain the intention of your spirit. Sooner or later, you will obtain what you desire—on the condition, though, that you always humble yourselves and recognize yourselves unworthy of such a state.

Or you might say, "We would like to receive what we have asked for." And I reply, Believe so, and you will receive that and greater things besides. And never stop asking, for no one will ever obtain what he wants if he does not persist. Furthermore, Do you want your petitions to be granted? Conform yourselves to them. For instance, Do you wish to have compunction? Cherish recollection. Do you wish to have humility? Embrace humiliations willingly, delight in being mocked, and rejoice in inferior things. Do you wish to have patience? Desire tribulation and suffering, for where there is no tribulation and suffering, there can be no patience.

You might ask, "What should the mind ponder during prayer?" I answer, On the admirable distinction of created things and their diverse beauty, on God's infinite providence, on the sweet Passion of Christ, and on a thousand other things that challenge the minds of those who are willing to consider them.

Mark this well, though, brothers: if you want to acquire easily the habit of mental prayer, read pious subjects and think of them, and find delight in constantly pondering holy matters.

Then, if you wish to understand why some of you are unable to carry the burden of religious life without the aforementioned fourfold prayer—which is the soul's spiritual nourishment—look at those who neglect mental prayer. You will see that they easily fail in their duties and are full of defects. Therefore, we desire and establish that for at least two hours, between morning and night, we shall dedicate ourselves to prayer, without distraction from any other activity. Apart from those hours, we earnestly implore you to have your minds constantly fixed on God, entertaining positive thoughts as you eat or do other things.[4] You might ask, "How can the mind and the hand simultaneously do different things?" And I respond, Do you

wish to understand this? I do not say, “Look at it,” but, “Touch it with your hands.” When you were in the world, even while eating or working, your minds were at times thinking of how to make some material gain, or of how to take revenge, or of some friends, or of something else. Well then, you have no other alternative but to do out of ingenuity and good will what you used to do out of habit or negligence.

CHAPTER XI: ON ACCEPTING CANDIDATES

Before accepting into the Congregation those you think worthy, read to them, or if they are unlettered, explain to them, at least three times, our Rule and these present Constitutions.

But we strongly advise and desire that you in no way accept anyone but those who may be helpful to themselves and to others. Therefore, if persons come who are not endowed with great intelligence but have enough good will, and they ask to be accepted, by all means accept them; but do not admit them yet into full community life or into the community chapters. If, instead, they are intelligent but lack a very large dose of good will, do not accept them by any means. If they are good, they will make great progress; if they are bad, they will bring others or themselves to ruin.

You will certainly see, brothers, that what causes grumbling, lukewarmness, and divisions in communities or Congregations is none other than the lack of spiritual light in those of little intelligence and the lack of spiritual fire in those of great intelligence. Scrutinize, therefore, the nature of both categories of candidates and understand very well whether they are “without light” or “without fire.” You will be able to discover this if you consider for a long time, not only for a day, what I am now going to say. It is better for you to accept few but well-disposed than many but ill-disposed. However, never judge one’s disposition by physical appearance or status but by inner motives. For this reason, you may also accept those who are weak or sick or old, or even peasants and other sorts of people (except women), provided that they are full of spiritual light and fire.

See to it that those whom you decide to accept first arrange for their possessions, either by testament or by previous divisions and distributions, without leaving or giving anything to the monastery.

You must be quite cautious. If someone who has outstanding debts or is undergoing a punishment for some wrongdoing would like to join our community, he ought to tell the whole truth in all sincerity. And if you ascertain that he has not revealed in all simplicity the above-mentioned matters, by no means admit him to the profession. He can be admitted only after two years have elapsed since he revealed his lie, and only after he has made due reparations for his offenses, and only after you have seen sure proof that he has matured and has expunged his habit of lying and his other bad tendencies. But if his lie is discovered after his profession, we desire not only that the Congregation be free from any obligation of paying his debts but also that he be dismissed from the Congregation without exception or delay.

But be prudent, brothers. Those who seem well qualified and are desirous of being admitted must also be examined and tested, to see if they are capricious in their desires or if they are altogether pretentious. They must be tested with all sorts of hardships and true humiliations, and you must sometimes even tell them that they will not be accepted. With these and other tests, scrutinize them for a long period of time, just as the philosophers and the early Church Fathers did.

Thus, if you hear them complain or see them becoming lukewarm and impatient, do not admit them. But even with those you judge worthy to be admitted or to make their profession, we do not want the Congregation to be under any obligation toward them—even after they have professed—should they deserve to be dismissed.

Let none of you, brothers, make your profession before the year of probation nor before you are twenty-five years old. And should one's profession be postponed, let him not tacitly consider himself to be already a professed religious, nor should he think himself bound to the Congregation until after his canonical and public profession, which is to be made with this clause: that if he is dismissed from the Congregation or abandons it he will not take advantage of, and indeed will renounce, our religious privileges, and that he does not want the Congregation to be in any way obligated to him, but rather he will consider that he simply left under the jurisdiction of the Ordinary.

CHAPTER XII: ON THE FORMATION OF NOVICES

You know very well, brothers, that the spiritual growth or spiritual decline of religious orders depends on the good or bad formation and training of novices. Therefore, we establish and declare that you must train all novices, wherever they may come from, in only one place and under only one Master.

You may ask, "Why such a directive?" I answer, Because different disciples instructed by different Masters might walk different and diverse paths of the spiritual life. And as a result of such differing formations, they might be unable to get along easily or they might even have unjust opinions of each other simply because one does not walk the path of the other. Hence, the result would be dissensions and divisions among them. Another reason for this directive is that there are very few people—very rare indeed—so perfect as to lead others to the fullness of perfection. If the Master, however, needs some help, he is allowed—according to necessity and availability—to choose one or more companions under him who will be ready to follow his standards.

So that the Master may be able to form the novices well, you must choose one who possesses the following qualities: he is to be a man of blameless and irreproachable life, full of common sense, well experienced in diabolic deceits and warfare, and knowledgeable in all the subtle aspects of vices and virtues—in short, a man truly holy and gifted with many natural abilities. Such a Master will certainly mold his disciples according to his own image. Do not believe that he will be able to help his disciples practice patience if he himself is ruled by anger, or humility if he is somehow vainglorious, or temperance or love for silence or any other virtue that he himself lacks. For how can you expect someone to do something beyond his own strength? Thus, if you see a good disciple come out of the hands of a bad Master, tell such a Master not to pride himself on his disciple's perfection, for it was not his ability but the power of the Holy Spirit that contributed to his disciple's surrender of self to God.

The Master, therefore, of such perfection we have now described, shall instruct the novices on the following subjects:

First (besides what has already been said and is yet going to be said about the three vows), the Master is to teach the novices how to break their will to the extent that it makes them sad if they follow their own will and happy if they do the will of others, provided that it is not explicitly evil. He is also to teach them how to please others at all times—even to their own

displeasure—and to give up their own opinions about anything and everything, never presuming to utter such words as "This I want, this I do not want," but rather, "I want what you want, I do not want what you do not want." The Master is to convince the novices that if they ask God to break their will, and if in this they persevere, He—I say with confidence—will certainly grant it, provided also that they act according to this desire.

The Master is to teach them to appreciate the lily of chastity so much as to see themselves as committing spiritual adultery when they find themselves placing or having their love in things, in people, or even in themselves. For God is a jealous God who forbids loving anyone or anything outside of Himself.

He is to teach them to so greatly desire poverty that they would avoid saying anything like "This is mine" and would refuse to keep anything (however insignificant it may be) for themselves. He is to teach them to desire poverty so much that they would long to be deprived of even the most necessary things, knowing that under the pretext of necessity the lure of superfluous things grows ever stronger—for while nature is happy with little, greed is not satisfied even in superabundance.

He is to teach the novices to take delight in mental prayer or meditation, as we have mentioned above, admonishing them that they will never make any progress if they do not learn to take the utmost delight in this kind of prayer. For how can one totally eliminate all other delights if such prayer does not fill his soul with new delights? He is to teach them also never to entertain fantasies and imaginations during prayer and never to abandon prayer should they feel no fervor; on the contrary, when fervor comes upon them, they should renounce it and consider themselves unworthy of it. Also, he is to remind them to apply their minds to the meaning of the psalm rather than to its words.

He is to teach them to pray with fervor, for the devil is always ready to besmirch drowsy prayers just as flies do with cold food, and such prayers are certainly displeasing to God. He is to exhort them to enter into God's presence when they travel or do other such things, always striving to purify their minds from any stain. He is to teach them to always persevere in prayer, even when their prayers are not answered immediately, for they must know that persevering and importunate people obtain what they ask for, whereas the lukewarm and the sluggish are certain to be granted nothing.

In these and so many other ways, the Master is to lead the novices to knowledge of and familiarity with God.

He is to make them understand that humility, the mother and guardian of all virtues, will never abide in their hearts if they do not eventually come to delight—with great love and keen desire—in persecutions, mockery, and humiliations. For as a matter of fact, anyone who tries to shun these experiences will certainly remain lukewarm. Let them keep in mind, therefore, that there can be no humility without reproaches and mockery, and anyone who spurns them or who is ashamed of associating with poor brothers, or of dressing poorly and living in humble dwellings, may as well abandon all hope of being able to achieve perfection, so long as such shameful feelings persist in him. Do you wish to flee from shame? Seek it out, hold it, and embrace it firmly. And then it will flee from you, leaving you crowned and victorious.

Second, let the Master teach the novices how to make their confessions. First of all, they should avoid confessing mechanically or out of mere routine. And also, they should not speak of the sins of other people, since they will not make penance in their stead. They should not

excuse their faults but rather emphasize them, for they were indeed the cause of Christ's death. Let the Master also teach the novices that by merely telling their sins they will not procure forgiveness for them. They should also resolve never to commit these sins again and intend to do penance for them as much as they can. Let the Master tell the novices to confess everything they can remember, and then, after earnestly renouncing their past faults, they must strive to avoid future ones. Let him teach them that once confession is made, they are not to give in to scruples, but at their Master's assurance they should entrust themselves to him and believe in him firmly and completely. For they must know for certain that their scrupulosity is due to their great pride, which makes them believe in themselves and not in others. They should then be aware that because of their scruples, either they will never gain perfection or, after a while, they will be freed from their scruples and their remorseful conscience and will thus commit freely all the sins they want. Let the Master also teach the novices to confess modestly, feeling truly shameful in their hearts and before God but totally unconcerned with outward shame. He must warn them, therefore, that in order to receive absolution for all their sins they must avoid hiding any of them out of shame, reminding them that if a person shows the physician all his deadly wounds but one, he will nevertheless die because of that one. Let him teach them that mere confession of one's sins is like the work of a farmer who prunes the branches and cuts off the shoots of a tree. (After all, he always has plenty to prune and cut.) But by digging up the roots of the tree, the farmer will someday stop pruning, and with little effort he will keep the fruit of the soil free of briers. Thus, penitents must insist on extirpating the roots of their vices. For instance: pride, the root of all sins,[5] is destroyed by the profound humility of a person who thirsts for insults and hungers for contempt; the vice of gluttony is rooted out by that voluntary poverty which can scarcely provide the common necessities of life. It is absolutely the same with all the other vices. Therefore, the more you get rid of the causes and roots of sin—digging them up and destroying them completely—the less you will suffer the thorns of your sins; thus will your consciences be less soiled and at peace (as far as this is possible here on earth), and you will harvest the fruit of a pure heart.

Third, the Master is to teach the novices to open their hearts to their Master without reservation, making it clear to them that anyone who mistrusts his Master is guilty of infidelity and of pride, which makes him believe that he is self-sufficient and capable of self-direction. But mark this well, novices: in no other way will you be more subtly deceived by the devil than by shutting your mouth. (For this reason, he is called the "devil mouth-shutter.") To this end, the devil shows you some imperfections in your Masters so that you will not trust them nor manifest your consciences to them. And since you are still inexperienced in spiritual warfare, he will deceive you.

Again, the Master is to teach the novices never to judge anyone for whatever reason, for this would be to usurp God's right.[6] Let him show them that it is their own duty to consider everything as good, and since some things look bad, to interpret or consider them as good, or at least believe that they were done with good intentions. If they acted differently, they would never attain simplicity nor would they be able to free their minds from fantasies. And so, let him teach them that it is their duty, and to their benefit, to not believe, in any way, accusations of evil (no matter who reports it), but, on the contrary, they should believe good whenever they hear it. Thus, he is to assure them that by practicing the things mentioned above and those that will be said later, they will become simple like doves and cunning like serpents.[7]

The Master is also to teach the novices to completely lay aside all fear of anything—fear, I mean, that causes pain—and to keep in mind that the Lord, any time He deems it expedient, may let them (whether they like it or not) be disturbed by various sufferings or by the devil himself, or by other bodily and spiritual tribulations. Let them therefore consider fear to be unnecessary, for in their own strength they cannot overcome it. But if they must fear someone, let the Master teach the novices to fear their greatest foe, who is so close to them—that is, their own self. For who can harm us more than we can harm ourselves? Therefore, let him make them understand—I repeat, make them understand and give them this as an unmistakable sign—that as long as they fear anything but themselves they have not yet achieved great perfection. For while they have such fear, in vain do they think that they can soar to the height of perfection while they are loaded down with so many burdens.

Regarding all these and other circumstances, dear novices, you must consult your Master if you truly wish to leave the novitiate and begin to walk in the way of your Masters.

Fourth, let the Master teach the novices to grasp and appreciate the beauty of the interior man. Since man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God,[8] the Master is to help them understand that the interior man has no lesser need of spiritual food than the exterior man has of natural food. Therefore, let everyone take heed: he who does not hunger for this spiritual food, who indeed does not anxiously seek it for his spiritual nourishment—seek it, I say, in the reading of Sacred Scripture, in the various exhortations, and in the community meetings—and who does not share it with others, will then be accounted guilty of causing himself and others to die of hunger and misery. Again, let the Master teach them the beauty of the interior man, so that they may not think that they can enter the house of the Lord without the nuptial robe,[9] that is, virtue in its fullness. Let him teach them also the vitality and frailty, the strength and weakness, the perfection and imperfection, of the interior man, so that they may see whether they are advancing in perfection or stagnating.

Let him teach them how to know with whom to converse on matters of the interior life, making them aware that man's enemies are often those of his own household,[10] and that these are the ones who often impersonate God. Let him teach them how to recognize the thoughts to which they should firmly adhere and the melodies that the Holy Spirit plays within these thoughts. And finally, let him teach them how to keep themselves recollected interiorly as well as exteriorly.

Fifth, the Master is to teach the novices not only how to maintain the fervor of their novitiate but also how to increase it by reminding them that "to not go forward is to go backward" and by warning them that exterior fervor and devotion is one thing but interior fervor and true devotion is quite another. That is why they should know that God very often, for their own good, takes away this exterior fervor and devotion, for various reasons: that man may understand that this is not within his own power but rather is God's gift, and thus he must humble himself all the more; that man may learn how to grow interiorly and recognize sincerely that it is his own fault if he loses fervor and devotion; that man may learn to sympathize with those who seem to have no devotion; that man may learn to practice the virtue of discretion; that man may avoid distractions and anything that can cause them; that man may learn to understand whether in time of aridity he progresses less than in time of such exterior fervor, or if without such fervor he becomes all the more truly inflamed with divine fervor and experiences spiritual growth.

Realize, though, that if someone loses fervor because they are deprived of this exterior fervor, you cannot conclude that he never had true fervor but simply that he is spiritually inconstant. And so be assured, novices, that if you apply yourselves to true devotion (which is a willing disposition toward the things of God), instead of seeking sensible sweetness you will become once and for all so fervent as to be unable to limit yourselves in the things that are pleasing to God. Thus, adversities will not make you unhappy but rather glad, and you will set your minds so high that you will no longer care about earthly things. Learn, however, to look deeply into yourselves and see whether in time of aridity the seed of good will is still alive in you. If not, do not be afraid or fainthearted because you lack exterior compunction and (as they say) devotion, for God is with you more truly and more lovingly than with those who enjoy consolations of the heart.

Let it be clear to you, novices, that it is proper for persons with generous hearts to wish to serve without reward, to fight without remuneration, and to travel without provisions for the journey. Thus, recall frequently that by persevering in this way you will grow in spirit and fervor. These can only be increased through a renewed, firm, and constant commitment and a resolute assessment of one's natural inclinations.

Sixth, let the Master teach the novices to possess true love and desire for total perfection. What would it profit them if they have many virtues but lack one? Indeed, what would it profit them if they possess all virtues but do not seek to reach the heights of sanctity? Anyone who is in such a spiritual state must acknowledge that he does not want to honor God as much as he possibly can. It is indeed a great shame for a servant of God to say, "It is enough for me to honor God thus far." Climb up as high as you can, for you owe Him more than ever. Indeed, let none of the novices—or, for that matter, none of us brothers—ever think that he has already made great progress, even if he has such great desire for the aforementioned things; for the more we pay, the more we remain indebted.

Indeed, you ought to keep in mind that the reason why we must desire and seek the highest degree of perfection is not to become superior to others but rather to place ourselves under the feet of all. Many, by the very fact that they did not desire such perfection with great humility and despised others for not following the same way, have themselves fallen into the bottom. Therefore, humility, with its power for total self-abasement, must always abide in the castle of perfection.

Seventh, let the Master teach the novices to practice silence; to maintain other external observances (certainly according to what is consonant with religious life, with circumstances of time and place, and with the opportunities presented to them); and to seriously consider the underlying reasons why these observances have been established, rather than treat the observances as an end instead of a means.

CHAPTER XIII: ON MANIFESTING ONE'S FAULTS

It is well known that there exist two kinds of faults.

First, there are faults that we commit in the recesses of our hearts, or in secret places. For those guilty of this kind, what is the use of not revealing such faults when they are so readily seen by the Supreme Ruler, to whom nothing is hidden? This kind of fault is washed away through sacramental confession and sincere contrition of the heart. But these faults are uprooted by confessing them also to others, especially those who know how to treat such wounds with

bistoury and ointment. Thus, let it be known to you, brothers, that anyone who does not manifest his spiritual illness—because he is ashamed or because he suspects that the doctors are incompetent or because he vainly hopes to confess it later on—will, I tell you, inevitably fall again into the same fault, and into other more serious and more visible ones.

The other kind of faults are those committed in the open where people see or hear them. You have to punish this kind of fault accordingly, taking into consideration the circumstances and place of its commission, the scandal it has caused, and the other occurrences surrounding it. But by no means should you think or intend—as if you could—to lead anyone back to the practice of virtue by means of incarceration or bodily torture, for virtue presupposes man's free will whereas the outward show of virtue makes one a hypocrite—a thing we abhor.

Hence, let anyone who sins openly likewise accuse himself openly and accept willingly the penance that is imposed upon him. Or rather, let him choose his own penance, so that any penance that will be imposed upon him by others may appear lighter than what he thinks he deserves. But if someone among you does not confess his fault and admit it openly, but rather cunningly and deceitfully conceals it, warn him and threaten him with expulsion—which you will carry out according to our rules.

From all this you can conclude that it is expedient for those who are guilty of both kinds of faults to give a public account of their shortcomings, so that they may be mercifully and properly assisted by the senior brothers.

Take note that in earlier times the Church Fathers, with great sighs and through voluntary imprisonment in jails with no doors or locks, healed those who confidently and very humbly recognized that their "fault does not deserve to be forgiven." And others said, "Not only are we undeserving of forgiveness; you should actually cast us out of your presence." Still others deplored their small failings more than those with big failings. And still others viewed themselves as partners of demons or of those who crucified Christ. Thus in these and so many other ways they chastised themselves, even depriving themselves of what was allowed.

These people did not speak like Cain[11] or Antiochus,[12] who said that their faults were greater than God's mercy; rather, with so much honesty they spoke like Peter: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner,"[13] or like the Centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy…."[14] These people were righteous and sorrowful, and they were so weighed down by the burden of their sins that their compunction urged them all the more toward the height of perfection.

Brothers, kindly and joyfully embrace these voluntary penitents, and urge them on in the Lord toward still better things, for their own good and the good of others.

CHAPTER XIV: ON PUNISHMENT AND ON THE CORRECTION OF DISCREETS

Brothers, ensure that neither jails nor any forms of torture exist in our houses, for we deem it superfluous to punish anyone among us who does not let himself be compelled by God's love and the love of virtue, or by fear of divine or human judgment. Indeed, we have no intention of giving you laws of fear but only of pure love.

If then a brother does not amend himself after three warnings, at the fourth one, expel him definitely and permanently. With each of the three warnings, include the threat of expulsion. This practice is to be observed in regard to any fault or any willful negligence committed by someone who is not interested in making progress.

All these matters are to be submitted to the judgment of the Discreets, who themselves will be judged before God and men as "indiscreet" and "destroyers of the religious life" if they allow its beauty to be stained by defects or grave negligence. The expulsion, in fact, is decreed not out of cruelty but out of great mercy, so that the offenders may not ruin others with their poisonous influence. Keep also in mind that we would certainly be considered quite presumptuous if we were to believe that those who are expelled cannot be saved outside the Congregation or will likely be condemned. Leave to them, brothers, both their goodness and their malice, for it is not our concern to judge them, praise them, or blame them. Rather, it is the concern of the Ordinary. To him we leave such matters. But if the expulsion is due to some grave fault, fully inform the Ordinary and leave the punishment to him.

Regarding the warning of expulsion, brothers, it does not matter at all whether the faults in question are great or small in the eyes of men, so long as they are willful or caused by willful negligence: for indeed, Christ died for all of them. If, instead, someone has committed a fault only out of simple negligence or human frailty, punish him thus so that he may be properly corrected rather than duly punished.

Furthermore, if you ever discover that the Discreets themselves, under the pretense of piety—but which is indeed impiety—have committed the same faults mentioned above, punish them in this way: never elect them again to such an office. If they complain, expel them from the Congregation. For just as the Superiors have the duty to love and care for the subjects, so also the subjects have the duty to help the Superiors observe the rules faithfully, knowing full well what the Scripture says: "Wickedness has come from those who pretended to govern the people,"[15] and in another passage, "The cause of ruin is bad priests."[16]

Now, so that you may avoid such evils with all your strength and prevent divisions or conspiracies without a leader, we desire that the Discreets be elected by the Superior and the professed religious who are present members of that community. After their election, all the other religious shall meet with the Superior in order to elect one brother—either one of those present or one of the Discreets proven to be truly zealous for the religious life—who will convene, when he thinks it necessary, all the professed religious for this specific purpose: to examine whether any of the Discreets or the Superior himself has been negligent, or even favorable, toward those deserving expulsion or a warning of expulsion. When, through balloting with over half of the votes, you have ascertained the truth of their negligence or connivance, inform those concerned about the sentence of expulsion, as explained above; for in no way are you to take into consideration any religious who are ill-disposed toward, and not truly zealous for, the religious life and the glory of God. Woe to us, when it may be truly said of us, "Lord, you have enlarged the nation, but have not increased the joy!"[17] He, then, who is elected to this office by the religious may remain in it according to their will; when he is removed, all the religious should meet again—as indicated above—to elect another.

CHAPTER XV: ON ELECTING COMMUNITY OFFICEHOLDERS

The Superior is to be elected by all present voting members of the community. If some are absent but are away only for a day, they must be called together for a meeting. The one elected with more than half of the votes will be the Superior.

It is the same when electing the Discreets and the brother who is to convene the community for the purpose of correcting the Superior or the Discreets. In any case, the aforementioned guidelines must always be followed.

There may be two or four Discreets, depending on the number of religious in the community. These elections will be conducted by ballot, whereas the other officeholders will be chosen by the Superior and the Discreets.

CHAPTER XVI: ON AMENDING THE CONSTITUTIONS

Whenever the Superiors and the Discreets deem it advisable to make changes, additions, or subtractions regarding the aforesaid matters, by no means can they do so without the approval of all the voting members of the whole Congregation. And if some of the voting members are absent, you should notify them in writing about what they must do, and afterwards notify them again about what has finally been established.

We desire that any addition, subtraction, or change will take effect only after everything said so far, and that which will be said later on, has been observed. Thus, if three-fourths of all the voting members reject the proposals being submitted, we insist that the whole matter be dropped.

If you do reach a conclusion that appears to imply or does in fact imply a relaxation of our religious life or of the rigor of these Constitutions, we want you to know how to act toward those who disapprove of such a baneful decision.

First, so that no one, especially the lukewarm, may contravene these present Constitutions, we prescribe that the one (or ones) chosen to correct the failure or negligence of the Superiors and the Discreets with regard to the correction and expulsion of confreres who committed an offense,[18] be authorized, together with the Major Superior, to set the appropriate agenda at periodic community meetings, in order to preclude any relaxation whatsoever of our way of life.

Second, in order to guarantee that all our directives are acted upon more effectively, we solemnly prescribe that, first and foremost, the Corrector or Correctors be officially given one or two houses that they deem suitable for their purpose. In this house, or these houses, there should be a Superior, or Superiors—the most senior or the two most senior professed religious of the Congregation—who will assign to this house, or these houses, the professed confreres who do not consent to any relaxation of our way of life, and they will appoint them as new community officeholders. This Superior, or these Superiors, shall be entirely free to remove any confreres who previously lived there.

Furthermore, we solemnly prescribe that this Superior, or these Superiors, may not be removed from their office—or the religious whom he, or they, assigned there—until the whole matter is definitively settled.

If the matter is settled in favor of the lukewarm or of any relaxation of our Rule, or if the proper procedure is not followed, we prescribe that the Superiors and confreres who favor our present rigorous way of life keep the house or houses mentioned above, and that the rest of the confreres are in no way allowed to interfere or become involved in the concerns of the said house or houses.

If, by any chance, in other houses there are those who do not favor this relaxation of our Rule, we desire that they join—even without asking permission from their Superiors—the

house or houses mentioned above, and those who favor this relaxation of our Rule can in no way hinder them or interfere with their actions in this regard.

Mark this well, brothers: When such religious degeneration occurs, many will rise up and claim, "We too want to live according to the original Rule." But see if those who speak thus actually observed the rules they were supposed to observe. If they did not, do not trust them, because in such situations there are only a precious few who are moved by a truly right intention. Some indeed will say that they want to reform themselves, but actually they do not want to submit themselves to anybody or face any inconvenience. Rather, they only want to enjoy a leisurely life and associate with agreeable companions, or perhaps they want ample time to study or to do other similar things. But, certainly, this is not true desire for reform. True desire for reform can be recognized as such: when one seeks only the pure honor of Christ, the absolute advantage of neighbor, and the true contempt of self, which rejoices in being despised. If you find them in this frame of mind, receive them into your company, and thus you will do what is pleasing to God; otherwise, as previously stated, do not admit them. And in order to prevent the Correctors or the Superiors or the brothers from effecting such ill-intentioned separation, we prescribe that they should in no way separate themselves if previously in our Congregation they were found to be rebellious, ambitious, or greedy, or had been guilty of negligence or of scandalous behavior. If, on the other hand, these religious had previously lived a blameless life, we desire that there should be no impediment to prevent them from separating.

We invoke God's blessings upon you who separate from the lukewarm, and we encourage you not to fear, even if you may not enjoy the support and sympathy of others, for the Apostles themselves were in the same situation. And the Holy Spirit will teach you everything[19] and will take care of you, since He is pleased with you, O little flock.[20]

Brothers, in making additions, subtractions, and changes—which should in no way relax our way of life but rather lead the Congregation to greater rigor and stability—we desire that the decision made by three-fourths of the voting members should prevail, as already said, so that the union of all concerned may endure. Finally, brothers, be aware that we want everything written in this chapter and in the entire present booklet of the Constitutions to be understood as is, that is, literally. Thus, we insist that you not add, subtract, or change anything whatsoever unless all is carried out in accordance with what was prescribed above.

CHAPTER XVII: ON THE SIGNS OF THE DEGENERATION OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

To ensure that no one will be unaware of the manner in which laxity and lukewarmness grow, we will describe such growth in reference to the following signs.

Remember, brothers, how the religious orders in the past were guided by the Holy Spirit; later, they lost their pristine fervor because of the many additions of laws and statutes made by those who did not possess the same spirit as their forefathers. That is why they introduced laws and customs that were as lax as they themselves were lax.

Given the fact that laxity and lukewarmness hate fervor, the lukewarm religious, according to their way of thinking and living, never want to allow fervent religious to part from them, claiming that union is good and separation is bad. But in our case, what happens is just the opposite: union is bad and separation is good. Thus, as St. Gregory says, "Saints provoke strife, but through love."[21] Knowing this, St. Dominic, who belonged to a certain order, withdrew from it and established a new order. Saint Anthony of Padua (who was originally with the

Friars Minor) and many others did the same, for they understood that it was a great evil to live with scorpions.[22]

Thus, the lukewarm religious, under the pretext of the goodness of union, do not allow the fervent ones to separate from them, for they are ashamed to see that somebody may be better than they are. You must also know that lukewarm religious do not allow such separation in order to cover up their stench with the good odor of the fervent ones, and thus they acquire temporal privileges by which they grow fat with earthly goods. But you who claim to be fervent, please, do not commit such an injustice—that is, to fatten God's enemies with Christ's patrimony!

Therefore, watch, and hold your heads high,[23] and when you see the following signs, escape with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, or else fire will burn you together with your brothers.

The first sign is the multiplication of rules and precepts that bind under penalty of sin. Let it be clear to you that the observance of rules is meant to make spiritual life not harder but easier and to lead religious beyond the law—living not by force but by love. When these rules and precepts—actually precipices—are multiplied, you will understand that obedience, the first solemn vow of religious life, has been relaxed. Likewise, the constant change of places, changes of laws and ordinances by those who keep and break them, the necessity of constraining and obliging the brothers to be present at community gatherings—these and similar things reveal the same situation of laxity.

Furthermore, when you see some religious do what they want, or say, "I want this" and "I don't want that," and when you hear Superiors sigh because they have no one to whom they can safely entrust certain tasks—from these and other similar signs, you will know that obedience has been perverted.

Regarding the second sign:

—when you see an ever increasing use of keys and strong locks, good safes, sturdy doors, and gates, you can conclude that the love for poverty is lost, because these devices are needed only on account of the abundance of goods. When one's possessions are few and of little value, these devices are not needed and are indeed useless;

—when you hear some religious complain that they lack this or that, and for this reason their grumbling increases;

—and again, when you see some religious, in a suspicious and subtle manner, demand to see the account books, or when you hear them say "this is mine," "this is yours":

Then you can say that the second vow, the vow of poverty, is gone to ruin.

Regarding the third sign:

—when you see our confreres, both young and old, engage in conversation and recreation, and yet they do not appear to be happy and content but rather fight and offend each other by their words and actions;

—when you see them chat idly or hear them talk about useless things, or when you see them take part in games or similar pleasurable diversions, or transgress the original guidelines concerning clothes, or take pleasure in little caged birds and potted flowers:

Then say that pristine and spotless chastity has begun to lose its original splendor and is tarnished.

Frequent conversation with laypeople, with agreeable friends, and with some nuns—these and other similar things point to the same conclusion.

So, when the three vows have been tarnished or not entirely kept, you who claim to be spiritual— What do you have that is not in common with the lukewarm?

Regarding the fourth sign:

—when you see that they prepare more food than usual or try to satisfy their appetites with delicacies or even with worthless food;

—when you hear them complain about food and wine;

—when you see some sit around idly, waiting for the bell announcing mealtime;

—when you see those responsible for the collection of alms become importunate;

—when you see them wait for the cake to be served or help themselves to sweet and savory wines:

In short, when you see similar signs, you can say that the devil has suspended the gluttons by their throats.

Regarding the fifth sign:

—when you see that Superiors seek excuses and forgiveness for their faults but are themselves harsh with the faults of their subjects, refusing to accept their explanations;

—when you see that, because of fear, Superiors do not punish the faults of their subjects but instead flatter them:

Know then that righteousness and the fear of God have left them.

—when again you hear many religious, especially Superiors, say, “It is enough to do this, why think much about perfection!” or “Our religious order is lax”;

—when you see that Superiors are more concerned with cutting out the weeds of self-love and other passions rather than uprooting them;

—when you see Superiors and religious comply with the whims of laypeople for fear of displeasing them: for instance, they allow them to have a religious service of their choice instead of the one prescribed for a certain liturgical solemnity, or they allow them to have Mass celebrated in any common building or even outside, or they give in to their wishes for unnecessary additions in our houses or in our churches;

—when again you see that Superiors and religious, in regard to themselves and others, do not encourage but rather discourage reception of the sacraments, or if they receive them only out of habit or to satisfy themselves or to gain something;

—when you see that Superiors and religious give fruitless exhortations or pompous speeches and preach empty sermons because they are afraid of pricking people’s consciences, or when they talk of virtues and vices only in generalities and not in practical details;

—when you see that in their spiritual conferences they treat the proposed topic on a speculative or argumentative level rather than on a moral and practical level; when you see that the elections of Superiors and officials are contentious, with disputes arising among them over degrees and honors; when you see that the number of religious ill-suited for the religious life increases, and yet these religious are not eliminated for fear that the order may come to an end:

When you see these and other similar things—which are too numerous to list—you know that religious life is deteriorating or has already deteriorated.

But you who want to be fervent, keep yourselves from taking part in their corrupt and lukewarm deeds.

CHAPTER XVIII: QUALITIES OF A REFORMER OF RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE COLLABORATORS HE SHOULD CHOOSE—OR, WHEN HE IS UNABLE TO FIND ANY, HOW TO FORM NEW ONES

When you see and come to understand from the aforesaid signs that true religious life has been placed at the bottom and lukewarmness at the top, raise your eyes on high to God's greater honor and your zeal for souls, and see if there is anything you can do to foster the true spirit of religious life.

But, first of all, consider the qualities a reformer must have, in accordance with what we will outline below; and if you see them in yourself, then without pride and presumption (for they can also be present), daringly exalt the Cross as mightily as you can above lukewarmness—all for the good of religious life. If, on the contrary, you find yourself unequal to the task we are about to delineate, be advised that the qualifications listed below are not meant to discomfit you on account of your inadequacy; rather, you should be encouraged to become what you are not.

And mark this well: Any effort to reform the religious life is futile without divine grace, which according to Christ's promise will stay with us even to the end of the world.[24] It is so ready to help us that it ought to accuse us and prove us guilty of cowardice due to our unfaithfulness in undertaking great tasks, rather than we accuse it of failing us.

First. Well then, keeping in mind what has already been said in the chapter concerning the Master of novices, you must learn by the virtue of discretion to choose the opportunities, the moment, the place, and the other conditions necessary to achieve the desired reform. And if all these are not present, you should be able to create them by preparing people who are qualified for the reform of religious life and by foreseeing all possible outcomes. It is necessary for the reformer to be so prudent as to be full of eyes in front and behind.[25] Thus, by means of this virtue of discretion, he will be neither too hasty nor too slow, but in due time he will certainly reach his goal.

Second. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, for against this undertaking many external and internal obstacles will arise, and they are apt to depress and choke weak souls. Indeed, many unseen demons—that is, the lukewarm, whose number is too large to be counted—will oppose you. By their hypocrisy they have won over many earthly lords and spiritual leaders. Though they seem to be good on the outside, inside they are like whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones.[26] With the help of these persons of distinction, the lukewarm provoke cruel wars against the fervent. But such has been permitted by God, that through battle virtue may prove itself and shine forth ever stronger. I would even dare to say that virtue without opposition has little or no value at all, whereas the greater the opposition, the more precious virtue becomes. Therefore, take courage and, by all means, fear not the attacks of the noonday devil;[27] remember always that malice cannot defeat wisdom. And by thus keeping little difficulties under control, you will overcome larger ones and accomplish everything you seek.

Third. It is necessary that you persevere in your undertaking. Many indeed begin with all their strength but then give up, overwhelmed by the extent of the work. You must know that if you get tired because of the difficulties or the length of the work, you have already conceded victory to the enemy, even before fighting. What good is it to begin well but not finish well? It

is little more than toiling in vain. If today you see everything go well for you, do not be elated. Tomorrow you will see everything turn against you. Still, be not disconcerted, but with perseverance continue your journey, and in due time you will reach the end. Changeable hearts are greatly displeasing to God because they are born of and nourished by infidelity.

Fourth. You must be utterly and profoundly humble. They who do not consider reproaches as sweet food, or who do not drink scorn with pleasure, or who do not long for or possess humility, are not fit to reform religious life. There is no humility without long-desired humiliations, for humiliations always go with humility. Through such humility, man realizes that he is an enemy of God, unworthy of His blessings and deserving of universal contempt. That is why a truly humble person is affable and pleasant to all—and therefore highly qualified for the role of reformer. Compassion and tolerance for other people's shortcomings are virtues that accompany a humble person, and they are absolutely necessary when helping those who are imperfect but truly desire to make progress.

Fifth. You must always be absorbed in God through constant prayer and meditation.

Frequent prayer and meditation will eventually teach you to start something in such a way as to lead others where they should go. Prayer will not allow anyone who wants to walk to fall into error; rather, it will successfully guide him—indeed, it will guide anyone who wishes to make progress.

Since prayer and meditation enlighten the soul, no one should presume to lead others if he does not pray and meditate. Prayer and meditation keep one steady before the throne of God, and thus the prayerful Christian knows what he ought to do and what he ought to leave aside.

Let no one think that he can lead someone else if he himself is blind; for in such a case, both will fall into a pit.[28]

Sixth. You need to have an absolutely good and right intention. Without it, you will never succeed in reforming religious life. In order to be a reformer, it is not enough merely to be good and straightforward in intention by natural inclination—and, I dare say, not even by the impulse of grace, unless it is grace of the highest degree. Only with this perfect intention is such a person given the right to assume the role of reformer of religious life. There were many in the past who thought they could bring about reform, but lacking this grace-filled, exceedingly good, and perfectly directed intention, they toiled in vain.

Have you ever seen spurious religious groups (I am not calling them Congregations) made up of rotten eggs and spoiled butter? You must know that the members of such groups lacked the above intention because some of them sought to unite with the reformers so as to become not their subordinates but their superiors; others sought comfort in companionship; others sought the opportunity for study; and still others sought to flaunt their great accomplishments. Indeed, having many other intentions, they sought to unite with the reformers, but they sought in vain.

Therefore, let your intention be right—namely, for the pure honor of God and for the benefit of others. And be firm and steadfast in self-abasement.

Anyone who lacks this absolutely good and right intention would do well to acquire it before undertaking the work of reform, for such an intention will endure and thrive with God's assistance—and thus his reform will last, at least for some centuries.

We could discuss here the reason why God allows the religious life to deteriorate, but this is not a task for our present considerations. Everyone can scrutinize for himself the book of

Supreme Providence and see at least this: that God, at certain historical turning points and difficult times, providentially crowns various captains.

Seventh. You must always keep alive your resolution to ever go forward and constantly pursue even greater perfection. Have you ever considered laws that are only punitive? Under these laws man will not make any progress, nor will he change altogether his bad habits, for interiorly he will always remain the same and he will always be ready to do evil if punishment is eliminated. Moreover, have you ever considered laws that do not attempt to reach perfect things? These laws too will fail, because *non proficere est deficere*—to not make progress is to fail. Therefore, if you remain attached to some of the aforementioned laws and ways of living, you can be sure that soon you will meet lukewarmness at your door. Do you really want to reform religious life? Then try always to increase what you have begun, both in yourself and in others, because the height of perfection is limitless. So then, do not ever think that what you have begun is enough. For you and for others, therefore, it is not enough to merely change the bad habits or improve the good ones—you must also strive to lead them to the height of perfection, for only by doing this will you become a good reformer of religious life.

Eighth. It is necessary that you always trust in God's help and that you come to know by experience that you must never be without it. Spiritual things can be lived only by spiritual people. Thus, the reformer must be spiritual and holy, and through previous personal experience he should know that God has never failed him in his needs and good resolutions. God, in order to appear more generous, often delays in giving what we ask of Him; nevertheless, once we have prayed to Him, He will grant our petitions, as He is wont to do.

Therefore, anyone who possesses the aforesaid virtues can take on the task of reforming religious life. This reformer will surely know who should be accepted or refused; who should be admitted right away and who should wait for a while; who can be treated amiably and who should be tested more harshly with humiliations before he is admitted; whom to retain and whom to dismiss.

Moreover, O reformer, you will encounter much opposition, but when it becomes intense you must trust all the more.

The very first ones to oppose you, as we have already mentioned, are the lukewarm with whom you live, since they consider it a shameful reproach to find themselves with someone better than they are. These religious readily call it "peculiarity" when someone unlike them wants to lead others to Christ. Indeed, this will be for you the most serious of all battles. In confronting this assault, it will be of much help to you if you change place and companions, or if you find people with influence and authority who are willing to foster and defend your work, or if you conceal your endeavors from the lukewarm—always maintaining, however, the purpose you have set out to accomplish. Since there are few religious who are able and willing to help you in the work of reform—indeed, there are very few who truly want to bear the Cross of Christ and share in its reproaches—be careful to choose for this work very few from among your previous companions or from among your confreres, for most likely many of them are still leavened with the yeast of lukewarmness. Nevertheless, if from among them you know a few who are truly fervent and discreet, these are certainly the ones to be preferred. But if you do not find such religious within the original group, you must look for others, and do not be greatly concerned if they are poor or old or sick, as long as they are intelligent and of great determination.

It may be good to attract companions for this initial reform with gifts or signs and miracles, but they should nevertheless be chosen for their irreproachable life and their adherence to the sound doctrine of the one who calls them. In this way, you avoid choosing those whose goodness is of little worth.

He who does not take into consideration the things we have said above must know that very easily, even from the beginning, lukewarmness will infiltrate—causing complaints and divisions among the religious and, furthermore, causing the religious to rebel against their Superiors. In these and other ways, lukewarmness will hinder progress.

Brothers, we have tried to make you aware of these few things. It is our hope that if you put them into practice, they will lead you to perfection, especially by helping you to avoid lukewarmness.

To the praise and honor of Jesus Christ, who died on earth and now reigns alive in heaven. Amen.

CHAPTER XIX: ON THE VISITORS

If sometimes it happens that there are Visitors, or when a visit is made by the Visitors, let the Visitors be advised of the following: the role of any skill is always to direct us to a goal and help us obtain and fashion the means to reach it. Now, our principal goals are the following: self-knowledge and self-mastery, the acquisition of Christian simplicity and kindness, the acceptance of humiliations, and the desire to love Christ. The Visitor or the Rector should then always aim at these goals.

As long as he can lead the brothers to these goals, let him not be too concerned—either through extreme poverty or by condescending to the weakness and capability of their generation—about granting them some, but not many, of their little wishes.

Likewise, if it is expedient to give some orders, let the Visitor consider which ones will lead to these goals, without contradicting what is prescribed in the Rule.

If at any time the Visitor needs to correct the defects of the brothers, let him be advised that the brothers should not be corrected by means of imprisonment or other such punishment. They should rather be helped in destroying the roots of their defects.

For instance, when complaints arise, there is no need to give such rules as, “If someone complains, let him do this penance.” Instead, the Visitor or Rector should first examine whether there is a just reason for his complaints. If he finds none, he should simply admonish the brother.[29] If the Visitor or Rector instead finds a just reason, he should exhort the brother and then ensure that the problem that caused his complaint does not happen again. The Visitor or Rector should always keep in mind that every time complaints arise, always—for certain—something is wrong, either in the cause or in the effect.

For instance, in cases when an order is given to increase fasting, vigils, silence, or other spiritual practices—which may not actually be contrary to God’s precepts or the precepts of the Church, though they entail greater efforts—one should not be too concerned about making changes, additions, or subtractions, for these things are not in themselves necessary means for reaching our goals. The truly necessary means are the following: voluntary self-humiliation, determination to endure pains and sufferings like those of Christ and of the saints, and willingness to renounce one’s own feelings and opinions.

The Visitor should make an effort to introduce these and other similar things, and to orient minds toward them. In this way, he will be able to eliminate not only the vices but also their roots. For if the roots are not destroyed, these vices, even though they are cut, will grow again. The Visitor must therefore ensure not only that vices are eliminated but also that their roots are destroyed. Moreover, he should endeavor not only to implant good morals but also to cultivate them and strengthen their roots. Thus, it is not enough to exhort the brothers to patience, humility, chastity, and other virtues simply because these virtues are useful to them. We must also instill in their souls the reasons why they should embrace these virtues. For example: man must be patient, for he deserves to suffer more than he already suffers because he has been the cause of Christ's death, and because on his own he can never satisfy for the sins he has committed.

Let the Visitor, then, diligently give the reasons why good morals should be implanted, rather than merely say, "You must have this virtue." These exhortations apply also to the Superior and the Discreets.

It is also his responsibility to visit the brothers; his visits should not be hurried or superficial, but rather—if time and circumstances allow—they should be long, careful, and considerate.

When he investigates, he should avoid using threats and commands; rather, he should inquire and investigate with kindness and charity. With the simple brothers, he should not ask questions that are subtle, so that he does not give them the impression that they are being scorned for not knowing how to answer, and so that he does not waste his time trying to teach them what they are unable to grasp. But if these simple brothers want to say something, he should willingly listen to them.

Therefore, it is necessary for the Visitor to be discreet, kind, affable, and patient, and he should not be disdainful toward anyone.

Let him ask each brother about the good and the bad of the monastery. He should believe the good things more readily than the bad ones, and he should try to remedy the latter.

His investigation should focus most of all on how the brothers are progressing or regressing in the spiritual life and on whether they diligently keep the written rules or neglect them.

We forbid the Visitors and anyone else—as much as we are able, in charity—to pay visits to or receive visits from relatives or acquaintances or anyone else from whom we cannot expect spiritual help. We also forbid that these visitations should cause our monasteries to be burdened with contributions and expenses. But brothers, do provide for Visitors, according to what we have proposed above regarding the sick and the healthy.[30]

Amen.

Thanks be to God, Jesus, and Mary.